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ABSTRACT

This paper rests on two propositions: that inservice training must radically change to result in the transfer of training to classroom practice, and that inservice training must be embedded in coherent school improvement programs in order for change to be sustained. Accordingly, the first section reviews three recent research studies designed to build understanding of the problems of transfer, increase rates of transer of training, and determine the extent of attrition over time when training was boosted by the coaching of teaching and peer coaching. The second section discusses the critical importance of staff development in school improvement, arguing that, on the basis of the research, the provision of coaching following initial training--even very strong training--will be necessary if new behaviors are to be integrated into classroom practice. The design and implementation of powerful training systems will require the full support of leadership at both the district and building levels. Administrators will have to examine priorities for staff development and the allocation of funds. Further, the organization of peer coaching systems will need to be cooperatively arranged between district administrators and school sites. Principals will be in a position to assist with more than just the logistics of peer coaching--they will be able to facilitate the implementation of such systems through establishing new norms that reward collegial planning, public teaching, constructive feedback and experimentation and through collaborative problem solving with their teachers. (TE)

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH STAFF DEVELOPMENT: THE COACHING OF TEACHING

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This paper rests on two propositions. First, that inservice training must be radically changed in order to result in the transfer of training to classroom practice; and second, that inservice training must be embedded in coherent school improvement systems in order for change to be sustained.

Research on training has demonstrated that with thorough training, which includes theory, demonstration, opportunities for practice and feedback, most teachers can acquire skills and strategies previously absent from their teaching repertoires (Joyce & Showers, 1982, in press). Unfortunately, that same literature suggests a failure to transfer new knowledge and skills to classroom practice, or, if initial transfer was accomplished, a rapid attrition of new behaviors over time (Fullan, 1982). In addition, if the object of training was addition to teachers' repertoire of skills and strategies radically different from their normal teaching styles, as contrasted with fine tuning of existing behaviors, transfer was unlikely to occur at all (Joyce & Showers, in press; Showers, 1982). Teacher trainers have for so long assumed that transfer would occur once skills were mastered that we have had to rely, for the most part, on researchers who study the change process to discover that much of our training has disappeared at the point we most care about--the interaction between teachers and students.

Training Studies

Concern for the transfer of training has motivated a series of training studies designed to build understanding of the problems of transfer, increase rates of transfer of training, and determine the extent of attrition over time when training was boosted by the coaching of teaching.

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The Coaching of Teaching

The first study (Showers, 1982) trained 17 junior high teachers of language arts and social studies in three models of teaching which represented new repertoires for the subjects. All teachers were trained together for eight weeks (three hours per week) in a setting which included theory presentations, demonstrations of the new strategies, peer teaching sessions with feedback from peers and

trainers, and practice with students in their own classrooms. At the close of this initial training period, all teachers were administered a conceptual level test (Hunt et al., 1978), and were interviewed regarding their attitudes toward the training and their perceptions of the usefulness of the newly-learned strategies. Teachers were then blocked on conceptual level and randomly assigned to either a coached or uncoached treatment condition for the next seven weeks. During the treatment period, all teachers were encouraged to use the new strategies and were observed in their classrooms regularly. At the end of the treatment period, all teachers performed a transfer task in which they taught the same unit of material to one class of students.

Transfer of training scores was computed for the project teachers based on their skill with the strategies, the appropriateness with which they used the new models of teaching in their classrooms, the degree to which they were able to teach their students to operate comfortably and efficiently with the strategies, and the frequency with which they employed the strategies during the treatment period and the transfer task. The maximum possible transfer score was 18.

The mean transfer score for coached teachers at the end of training was 11.67 and for uncoached teachers 5.75. Conceptual level operated as predicted only for the coached teachers (see Table 1). Interaction of the coaching treatment with conceptual level indicated that high CL teachers who were coached transferred training at a much greater rate than did low CL coached teachers, but uncoached teachers transferred training at a very low rate regardless of their conceptual level.

TABLE 1

Mean Transfer Scores for Coached and Uncoached Teachers By Conceptual Level

		Coached	Uncoached
CL	HI	13.6	5.5
	LO	9.2	6.0

Interestingly, at the end of initial training and again at the end of the treatment period all teachers from both groups reported positive attitudes toward training as well as intentions to use the new strategies in their classroom instruction. Those teachers who had not used the strategies during the previous 10 weeks nevertheless

felt that during their summer break they would incorporate the new models of teaching into their instructional plans for the coming school year.

This first coaching study also yielded information on the difficulties experienced by teachers as they attempted to transfer complex new teaching strategies into their instructional repertoires. Teachers reported concerns with additional time required for new and, at first, more awkward teaching techniques, anxieties regarding possible management problems resulting from teaching strategies that elicited different sets of pupil behaviors, and fears that their experimental behavior would not be supported by administrators. The most serious problem, however, lay in finding appropriate occasions for use of the new strategies. Teachers who had typically relied on curricular materials provided by their state or district for organizing courses found it difficult to reorganize material in ways suitable for the new strategies. For example, teachers using a social studies text organized by countries found it difficult to draw from their subject/curriculum four or five underlying concepts the mastery of which would enable students to examine similarities/differences across cultures. Or teachers using English texts that emphasized structural analysis of the language were puzzled about the appropriate scheduling of strategies that focused on writing skills.

The power of coaching in attacking transfer problems was apparent in our final results. Teachers who were not coached practiced the new strategies less and therefore developed less technical skill in the use of the models. Because uncoached teachers practiced less, their students had less opportunity to master new sets of responses required by specific strategies, and therefore, their teachers never reached a level of comfort with the strategies that might have encouraged further use. Uncoached teachers who did continue to practice occasionally but without the analysis and feedback provided by coaching did not, for the most part, develop greater skill in the strategies. As learning psychologists have taught us, practice without feedback tends to make us more and more proficient in our mistakes.

Coaching in this study was provided by a single consultant who observed each teacher in the coaching sample once a week and then conferred with that teacher to provide feedback, support and encouragement, assistance in planning future lessons, and occasionally, to help with the location and production of materials.

Long-Term Effects of Coaching

A second study followed up our first set of teachers six to nine months after the close of the first project to determine if skills and transfer of training were retained (Baker, 1983). We were also curious to discover if, as in the Sharan & Hertz-Lazarowitz Study (1982), there might exist a "lag" effect whereby teachers improved

the skill and appropriateness with which they used complex new strategies after a summer break.

Baker asked teachers in the Showers' sample from the previous year to demonstrate lessons with the strategies learned and to be interviewed. Several results are noteworthy here. First, coached teachers maintained their advantage in both skill and transfer six to nine months after training (see Table 2). Second, transfer scores increased for both coached and uncoached groups of teachers during this period. Although teachers reported that they were no more proficient with the strategies than they had been at the close of the previous school year, their actual transfer scores provided some support for a "lag" effect following strong training. Finally, several of the uncoached teachers found they were unable to demonstrate the models at all following a several months-long hiatus in practice with the strategies. While this had the effect of artificially inflating the transfer scores of the remaining uncoached teachers, a significant difference still existed between the two groups.

TABLE 2

Persistence of Training Effects

	Coached	Uncoached
Skill	4.0	2.9
Transfer	15.25	10.7

Peer Coaching

A second study by Showers (1983, in press) investigated the effects of peer coaching on teachers' ability to transfer new models of teaching into their instructional repertoires. Specifically, the study sought to discover if peer coaches could be trained to provide consistent coaching to a new group of trainees and if a peer coaching treatment would replicate earlier effects of coaching. Furthermore, we hoped to determine the degree of teacher collegiality developed by a peer-coaching approach to training. Little (1982) reported that schools with norms of "learning on the job" and continuous improvement were characterized by high degrees of teacher collegiality.

Six peer coaches (drawn from teachers who participated in the first Showers' study) each coached two to three teachers following an

initial six-week training period for 19 teachers in two models of teaching (n=13 coached teachers and 5 uncoached teachers). Peer coaches observed each of their trainees one period per week and met with them following the observation for the coaching sessions. Specifics of the coaching treatment were modeled after the procedures developed by Showers in her 1982 study. Trainees were assigned to peer coaches on purely logistical grounds (e.g., teachers' choice of class to work with, placement of preparation periods, and in some cases, distances between schools).

At the end of the project, the mean transfer score for peer-coached teachers was 12.00 (S.D. = 2.10) and for uncoached teachers the mean transfer score was 9.5 (S.D. = 1.27). Furthermore, coached teachers reported unanimously that the peer coaching had been a positive experience both professionally and interpersonally. Given that several trainees had expressed concern at the start of peer coaching regarding their particular peer coach, we were relieved to discover that the coaching experience had remained consistently at a highly professional level, despite several previous conflict situations.

Staff Development and School Improvement

The role of staff development in school improvement appears to be of critical importance. Whatever the content of inservice training, if it represents an addition to repertoire for participating teachers, training will need to be considerably more intensive than is normally the case if new behaviors are to be integrated into classroom practice. The provision of coaching following initial training, even very strong training, apparently is essential for most teachers if new skills and strategies are to be appropriately implemented.

Implementation of a peer coaching program in a school has effects much more far reaching than the mastery and integration of new knowledge and skills for individual teachers. The development of school norms which support the continuous study and improvement of teaching builds capability for any kind of change, whether it be adoption of a new curriculum, school-wide discipline policies, or the building of teaching repertoire. By building permanent structures for collegial relationships, schools can organize themselves for improvement in whatever area they choose. The studies reported here have demonstrated both the necessity for fully elaborated training systems (as contrasted with the more common one-shot inservice offerings) and the viability of peer-coaching relationships.

Implications for Leadership

The design and implementation of powerful training systems is unlikely to occur without thoughtful and determined leadership at

both the district and building levels. Administrators will have to carefully examine priorities for staff development and the allocation of funds to staff development activities. Whatever the size of a district/school staff development budget, few budgets can sustain both intensive, focused training and numerous one-shot activities at a very high level of funding. Decisions must be made regarding the outcomes expected of staff development programs. When the desired outcome is simply increased awareness of a subject, funding might legitimately support the occasional two-hour speaker. When, however, the expected outcome of staff development is change in the instruction students receive, funding will probable have to be focused more narrowly in order to support the magnitude of training necessary to bring about that change.

Organization of peer-coaching systems will most likely need to be cooperatively arranged between district administrators and school sites. In schools where teachers already have preparation periods scheduled into their work days, teachers can be organized into coaching teams for collaborative planning and feedback sessions. Some schools have used specialist teachers to release teachers for observation periods, and some principals have taken classes in order to provide observation times for teachers. In other cases, teachers have had to videotape lessons for sharing at a later time when live observations could not be arranged. In the peer coaching study reported here, substitutes were provided for peer coaches one day per week in order for them to complete their observations and conferences. Creative problem-solving by teachers and administrators will almost surely result in solutions to the time demands of the continuous study and analysis of teaching. Without the active support and involvement of building principals, however, few teachers will be able to establish such systems for themselves.

Principals must do more than assist with the logistics of peer coaching systems if they are to become institutionalized. Teachers have so long worked in isolation that serious distortions have often developed about personal competence. Principals must work to establish new norms that reward collegial planning, public teaching, constructive feedback, and experimentation. Professional growth must be seen as a valuable and expected process and clearly separated from the evaluation of performance.

Not only are principals in a unique position to influence building norms, they are also perfectly situated to facilitate the implementation of peer-coaching systems through collaborative problem-solving with their teachers. Flexible scheduling for training, observation, feedback and planning can be uniquely planned to meet the needs of individual faculties. Available rewards and incentives can be brought to bear to encourage developing norms of collegiality. Parents and community members' support can be solicited by explaining the purpose and expected outcomes of intensive staff development programs embedded in larger school

improvement efforts. And principals must initiate these activities if they are to have any hope of affecting entire schools.

Finally, principals can use their influence to ensure that quality inservice programs are provided for teachers. Coaching programs must have some content to coach, and the greater the expertise brought to bear on identified problems, the greater the dividends from a coaching effort.

We understand more about the change process today than at any time in the past 50 years. The knowledge about effective training combined with new understanding of the organizational requirements for change places us in a favorable position to attack educational problems and have some hope for effective solutions. All those involved in the educational endeavor have important roles to perform if we are to succeed in creating excellent schools. The knowledge base exists to guide our efforts. Let us begin.